

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a computer system to provide a user interface to a heterogeneous distributed database including a plurality of databases of a different format, ~~data storage system~~, said computer system including a rule store storing one or more rules, said method comprising the steps:

providing a user interface to said rule store enabling user configuration of said rule store with one or more rules, each rule identifying a handler program, said handler program being associated with one or more user requirements and being operable to interact with said heterogeneous distributed database ~~data storage system~~ in accordance with said user requirements;

receiving a request detailing one or more user requirements; and

responsive to receipt of said request:

a) selecting a handler program by searching said rule store for a rule specifying one or more handler programs given said one or more user requirements;

b) running said selected handler program to interact with one of said plurality of databases. ~~data storage system~~.

2. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein said ~~information relating to a handler program is identified by~~ comprises the name and the location of the handler program.

3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein said ~~information relating to a handler program is identified by~~ comprises the handler program itself.

4. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of running a default handler program to interact with said data storage system if no rule associating a handler program with the one or more user requirements of said received request is found.

5. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein said rule store user interface provision step comprises storing a rule associating predetermined user requirements with a handler program executable to interact with said rule store to introduce a further rule contained within said request into said rule store.

6. (Original) A method according to claim 5 wherein said further rule replaces an existing rule.

7. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein said request comprises a request to store said handler program.

8. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 7 wherein said handler program comprises a default handler program.

9. (Original) A method according to claim 1 wherein said request contains a rule associating a handler program with the user requirements of said received request.

10. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein said rules are expressed in the form of text.

11. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 10 wherein said rules are preparable ~~reparable~~ using a text editor.

12. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein said rules are indicative of a time after which said rules should no longer be applied.

13. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein said data storage system comprises a plurality of databases and wherein each one of said plurality of databases has a different data handler

14. (Original) A method according to claim 13 wherein said databases are of a different format to each other.

15. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein said rule store user interface is restricted to a certain class of user.

16. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein the data storage system user interface is available to a different set of users from those able to modify said rules in said rule store.

17. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein said computer system comprises a plurality of computers in communication with one another, the handler programs being run on a different computer to the one that receives said request.

18. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein said computer system comprises a plurality of computers in communication with one another, the rule store being on a different computer to the one that receives said request.

19. (Currently Amended) A computer system operable to provide a user interface to a heterogeneous distributed database including a plurality of databases of a different format, data storage system, said computer system comprising:

a heterogeneous distributed database; ~~data storage system~~;

a rule store;

a user interface to said rule store operable to enable a user to configure said rule store with one or more rules, wherein each rule identifies a handler program, said handler program being associated with one or more user requirements and being operable to interact with said heterogeneous distributed database ~~data storage system~~ in accordance with said user requirements;

request receiving means arranged in operation to receive a request detailing one or more user requirements;

rule store searching means operable to select a handler program by searching said rule store for a rule that specifies a handler program given said one or more user requirements of said received request; and

handler program running means operable to run said selected handler program to interact with one of said plurality of databases, ~~said data storage system~~.

20. (Previously Presented) A digital data carrier carrying a program of instructions executable by processing apparatus to perform the method steps as set out in claim 1.

21. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a computer system to provide a user interface to a heterogeneous distributed database including a plurality of databases of a different format, ~~data storage system~~, said computer system including a

rule store storing one or more rules, each rule associating a handler program with one or more request characteristics, said method comprising:

providing a user interface to said rule store enabling the modification of said rules in said rule store;

receiving a request having one or more request characteristics;

responsive to the receipt of said request:

a) finding a rule in said rule store that specifies a handler program with the one or more characteristics of said received request; and

b) running said specified handler program to interact with one of said plurality of databases. ~~said data storage system.~~

22. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 21 further comprising storing one or more rules in said rule store.

23. (Currently Amended) A computer system for providing a user interface to a heterogeneous distributed database including a plurality of databases of a different format, ~~data storage system~~ said computer system comprising:

a heterogeneous distributed database; ~~data storage system;~~

storing means arranged in operation to store one or more rules, each rule associating a handler program with one or more request characteristics;

means arranged in operation to provide a user interface to said rule store  
enabling the modification of said rules in said rule store;

receiving means arranged in operation to receive a request having one or more  
request characteristics:

finding means arranged in operation to find a rule in said rule store that specifies  
a handler program with the one or more characteristics of said received request; and

running means arranged in operation to run said specified handler program to  
interact with one of said plurality of databases. ~~said data storage system.~~